



**STATE OF NEW HAMPSHIRE DEPARTMENT OF SAFETY**  
Richard M. Flynn, Commissioner



**Division of Fire Safety**  
**OFFICE OF THE STATE FIRE MARSHAL**  
J. William Degnan, State Fire Marshal  
**NEWS RELEASE**

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE  
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**FIRE MARSHAL OFFERS SAFETY TIPS FOR OUTDOOR COOKING**

CONCORD, N.H. – With the Memorial Day weekend approaching, State Fire Marshal J. William Degnan is urging New Hampshire residents to exercise caution in the use of grills for outdoor cooking. Degnan said improvements to gas grills have made the devices safer, but outdoor cooking appliances are still a major cause of structure fires.

“Code changes now require propane gas cylinders to have overfill protection devices (OPDs),” Degnan said. “According to the National Fire Protection Association (NFPA), the number of home structure fires involving gas grills has been cut in half since the new requirement took effect in 1998. The number of gas grill home structure fires nationally decreased from 1,200 in 1997 to 600 in 2002. By contrast, the number of home structure fires involving charcoal grills remained steady during that same period.”

Degnan said OPDs were required for new cylinders beginning in September of 1998 and all old cylinders had to be retrofitted with the devices beginning in April 2001. OPDs shut off the flow of propane before capacity is reached, limiting the potential for release of propane gas if the cylinder heats up. OPDs are easily identified by their triangular-shaped hand wheel.

While the numbers of gas grill fires have gone down, Degnan still urged caution when grilling to ensure safe cookouts. Leaks and breaks in the gas cylinder or hose are the leading cause of gas grill fires, accounting for nearly half. Placing combustibles too close to heat and leaving cooking unattended are the two leading causes of charcoal grill home structure fires. Half of all gas grill and charcoal grill home structure fires begin on an exterior balcony or unenclosed porch, so it is important to grill not just outside your home but well away from your home, Degnan said.

Here are some suggested safety tips for outdoor grilling:

- Gas and charcoal BBQ grills must only be used outdoors. If used indoors, or in any enclosed spaces, such as tents, they pose both a fire hazard and the risk of exposing occupants to toxic gases and potential asphyxiation.
- Position the grill well away from siding, deck railings and out from under eaves and overhanging branches.

**(MORE)**

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- Place the grill a safe distance from lawn games, play areas and foot traffic.
- Keep children and pets away from the grill area. Declare a three-foot "safe zone" around the grill.
- Put out several long-handled grilling tools to give the chef plenty of clearance from heat and flames when flipping burgers.
- Periodically remove grease or fat buildup in trays below grill so it cannot be ignited by a hot grill.

#### Charcoal Grills

- Purchase the proper starter fluid and store the can out of reach of children, and away from heat sources.
- Never add charcoal starter fluid when coals or kindling have already been ignited, and never use any flammable or combustible liquid other than charcoal starter fluid to get the fire going.

#### Gas Grills

Check the gas cylinder hose for leaks before using it for the first time each year. A light soap and water solution applied to the hose will quickly reveal escaping propane by releasing bubbles. If you determine your grill has a gas leak, by smell or the soapy bubble test, and there is no flame:

Turn off the gas tank and grill.

If the leak stops, get the grill serviced by a professional before using it again.

If the leak does not stop, call the fire department.

- If you smell gas while cooking, immediately get away from the grill and call the fire department. Do not attempt to move the grill.
- Use only equipment bearing the mark of an independent testing laboratory. Follow the manufacturer's instructions on how to set up the grill and maintain it.
- Never store gas cylinders in buildings or garages. If you store a gas grill inside during the winter, disconnect the cylinder and leave it outside.